

**REVOLUTIONARY FILMS/CHICAGO '76**  
sponsored by The Chicago Tribune and  
The Film Center of the School of the Art Institute

Sunday, July 25, 1976, 2:00

P A N E L -- F I L M & R E V O L U T I O N

Panel members include:

John Hess, co-editor, Jump Cut  
William Horrigan, co-editor, Northwestern Film Reader  
Julia Lesage, associate editor, Jump Cut and Women & Film  
Allen Ross, N.A.M.E. Filmgroup  
Sharon Russell, editor, Revolutionary Films/Chicago '76 catalog

The panel members prefer open discussion with the audience to any sort of formal presentation, so please feel free to express your reactions to the festival, the issues raised by its films, and the points of view represented by the members of the panel.

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Q U E S T I O N N A I R E -- F I L M & R E V O L U T I O N

The attached questionnaire was sent to many members of the film community in the United States, though deadline restrictions prevented a full range of response. Replies have been arranged in alphabetical order within each question and have been somewhat edited to avoid duplication. Respondents include:

Regina Cornwell (RC) -- Film critic and teacher

Gary Crowdus (GC) -- Vice President, Tricontinental Film Center  
Editor, Cineaste

Haymarket (AY) -- Betsy Martens and Teena Webb responded for Haymarket Film and Video, non-profit people's film production and distribution affiliate of Kartemquin, a Chicago-based production house

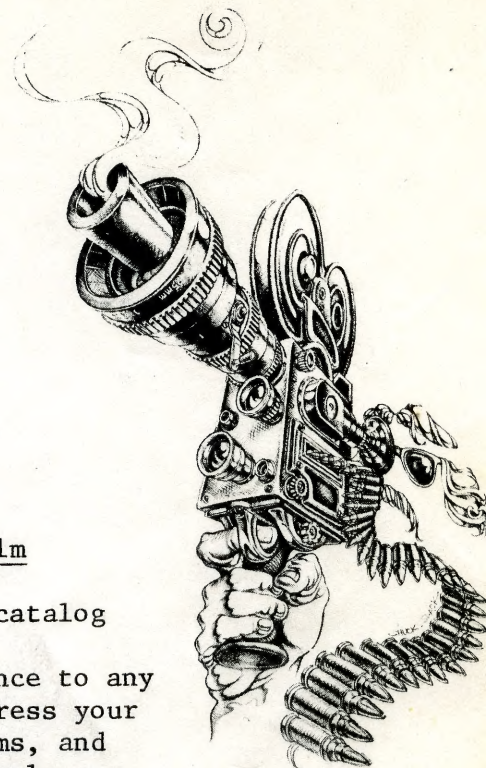
Chuck Kleinhans (CK) -- Co-editor, Jump Cut

Julia Lesage (JL) -- Associate editor, Jump Cut and Women and Film  
Contributing editor, Cineaste  
Assistant professor of English, U. of Illinois, Circle

Barbara Halpern Martineau (BHM) -- Author of women imagine women

King Vidor (KV) -- Director/writer

The questionnaire could not be included in the catalog and is therefore being distributed free of charge to all who attend this open forum.





## QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

### 1. Should definitions of revolutionary film include considerations of form as well as subject?

RC---Yes, such definitions should include considerations of form as well as subject. But all of your questions are difficult to answer in a few lines. I keep on substituting political for revolutionary and continue to recall Godard's comment that one doesn't make political films but makes films politically.

Revolution must be internalized. If film is used purely for its specular qualities to record or document or reconstruct revolution such a criteria of realism is simply empirical, most superficial, undialectical and does not capture the tension of struggle for deep radical change which an art in a revolutionary period must do--as did Constructivism in the Soviet Union. There is a contradiction in a work which hails revolution yet continues to employ acceptable conventions of popular entertainment cinema through which to speak of that revolution. This is precisely the ground on which Vertov, and after him, Godard, criticize Eisenstein--his use of theatrical modes, linear plots, etc. even while practicing montage and expounding on it.

One might also extend the notion of revolutionary film. For instance, what is the "spirit of revolution?" Pre-revolutionary artists in Russia became very involved with formal questions in writing, painting, sculpture and criticism as they saw all of this involved with issues of perception and new modes of perception. Revolutionary art can only be made in a pre-revolutionary or revolutionary society, but making art politically goes on all of the time in the sense of the potential changes which take place through formal innovation and formal demands on a viewer or reader and the way that reader relates that work to other things in culture-at-large.

GC---Yes, absolutely, although a radically new, "revolutionary" form is not necessary to the expression of revolutionary themes. Traditional narrative forms--particularly at their best, as in the films of Gillo Pontecorvo, for example--can be effectively utilized.

HAY--It's not a question of "should." Form and content are wedded, but the marriage is a rocky one in a capitalist society, where the two seem to separate in order to de-emphasize the control of the medium of corporate economics and the class interest served by that control. There are, of course, other considerations than those of form and content, not the least of which is the audience. "If there is one single quality that separates 'political' from 'non-political' film, it lies in the relationship between the work and its audience," says James Monaco. The purpose of the revolutionary film, after all, is to serve its audience in some concrete way.

CK---Every definition of revolutionary film considers both form and content, even if the definer is not aware of it. Since the great Soviet films of the Twenties, radical content has been on the agenda. However it is sometimes assumed that modernist form in and of itself is "revolutionary." Such a view is nonsense: as Eisenstein, Brecht, Godard, and



many other political filmmakers have repeatedly said, a radical form must be combined with political content to produce a revolutionary film.

JL---It is easier to think of the political implications of form in a negative sense--to see the false objectivity of cinema verite, to understand a soap-opera structure, to see the facile liberalism of TV news. Of the films made after a revolution, Cuban films seen excitingly innovative in form while still appealing to many people.

BHM--A. Definitions are exclusive.

B. Try another: should considerations of revolutionary film exclude definitions of subject as well as form?

KV---Form is probably controlled by financial and budgetary considerations more than questions of cinematic ones. The lower budget revolutionary films usually take the form of documentaries but this does not mean that greater impact cannot be gained in the full-length film.

## 2. Should the means of production be included in an evaluation of revolutionary film?

RC---I would like to say yes but with some qualification. First I clearly do not believe that a revolutionary film can be made in true Hollywood style; its needs, structure and goals are totally at odds with Hollywood. Film is a form of art which can be made by a collective effort or by someone working alone or virtually alone. However there are those who hold up film as a modern and liberating art because, as they see it in rather doctrinaire manner, it eliminates the individual artist, auteur, etc. For them it must be made by a collective and because of its costs it must be made somewhat simplistic. Hierarchies and power structures must be changed. But is collective art really the only kind? It is one kind. The social, political and psychological role of artist must change so that artist is no longer thought of in romantic fashion as genius and privileged being whose work is ineffable. Yes, attitudes toward making, toward the artist, toward the work must change but also artist and work are ultimately separate and one must avoid the intentional fallacy, I should think, especially for work which purports to be revolutionary.

GC---Depends on what you mean by "means of production." It is important to know, for instance, who financed a film, whether it's United Artists or a political party. If you're talking about a revolutionary filmmaker having access to only a 16mm camera and limited lighting equipment as opposed to full-scale Hollywood-type production facilities, this should be a consideration for the film critic but shouldn't be for the general audience (too many filmmakers, in fact, use this as an excuse). I don't agree with those critics and theorists who argue that a truly "materialist" film must show the means of production (the camera, editing equipment, etc.) on screen so that the audience will be aware of the film's nature as a product of human labor.

HAY--Means of production seems to have been used carelessly in question 2 although it raises interesting questions. The owner of the means of production controls the product, in this case, the "work of art," and since the ownership of the means of production largely determines the nature of the product, i.e., a movie, any evaluation of a film will be a partial evaluation of the means of production. Biberman cites examples



of miner-actors making suggestions which made SALT OF THE EARTH more accessible and believable to its audience. THE MOLLY MAGUIRES, on the other hand, made without the participation of the Molly Maguires or their ideological heirs, distorts what was essentially a people's struggle into an individualistic drama of terrorists vs. police informer.

CK---The evaluation of a revolutionary film must be essentially political. To Marxists, this means that any judgement of a political film must consider the historical moment in which it is shown--the time, place, audience, circumstances, and political context. The same film will have a different "reading" with different audiences depending on class, sex, race, age, experience, and many other factors.

JL---I'm more concerned with evaluating the relations of production. How can an auteur make a politically revolutionary film? Many groups in Europe making films about and with workers, women's filmmaking collectives, and groups such as Sanjines Ukamau group have decided to make films collectively so as to teach skills to those who otherwise have not been able to learn them (women, workers, colonized peoples, youth) and to break down the hierarchization characteristic of all capitalist film production.

BHM---Yes, if evaluation includes consideration.

KV---The finished product should speak for itself, say what it has to say in its completed form. The viewer is very seldom concerned with the means of production.

3. There is usually a dual audience for a revolutionary film--the audience in the country for which it is made (the revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation) and the interested viewer in other countries. Do you see any relationship between these audiences? Are there occasions when the secondary audience should be considered before the primary one? If so, how should this be accomplished? What is necessary for the secondary audience to understand a film which is primarily for internal consumption?

RC---Yes, a primary and secondary audience might well relate along lines of experience as oppressed class members in their respective societies, thus understanding the political and power relationships by which they are victimized. Films celebrating a past revolution, such as OCTOBER or THE FALL OF ST. PETERSBURG are commemorative for the society for which they are made, recalling history and continuing the spirit. Historically the secondary audience, by virtue of time and numbers, probably assumes more importance. Perhaps this is the greatest value of political and revolutionary films. If these films have emotional and agit-prop effects these effects are inevitably transitory. If they are truly revolutionary it would seem that they would need to be didactic in some sense and force many questions and explorations so that the audience may be inspired by the "spirit of revolution" to do its homework. A revolutionary film cannot be readymade and totally self-enclosed. It may function of itself as a work of art but also as a tool for political information and change. Rather than a familiarity with the subject which would generate total identification and be of little political and artistic value, the very lack of total



familiarity on the part of the secondary audience with the historical and theoretical issues may cause a distance and force the viewer to think and then act.

GC---Yes, there are all sorts of possible relationships but it's too vague a question unless you can discuss a specific film. Yes, I can imagine instances where a secondary audience could be as important or even more important than the primary audience--for instance, a film documenting the true nature and goals of a revolutionary movement in a colonized country could be as important or even more important for the secondary audience in the colonizing country (where the film could be utilized to mobilize public pressure to dissuade the colonial government from sending troops to crush the revolution). As for a secondary audience's understanding of a film intended primarily for internal consumption by the primary audience, a speaker appearing with the film or extensive background notes to provide information on the socio-political or cultural situation would be necessary.

HAY--A revolutionary film can certainly build international support for the revolutionary forces in another country. Such a film forms a political bond between the two audiences and that bond is the relationship between them. On the mass level, it is the international proletariat recognizing itself, and there are occasions when international support is vital to the success of a revolutionary struggle. SAMBIZANGA, for example, is useful in arousing support in the USA for African liberation struggles as well as commemorating the process for Africans. More specifically, a film such as STATE OF SIEGE, if nothing else, tends to discourage huzzahs for American benevolence in supporting repressive regimes. In order for the secondary audience to understand a film which is primarily intended for internal consumption, the audience must either begin with an understanding of the class dialectics of a situation, or the film must explain those dialectics in a direct manner, as for example in the tailor's parable on Marxist economics in SAMBIZANGA.

JL---That films circulate internationally is an historical fact, and for all of Godard's caveats about their fictional nature, they still remain a major source of our information about imperialism and revolutionary movements around the world. The "secondary" audience for revolutionary film is us, for we have the money to buy up the world's cultural products. And the major political question for us is whether or not these films when shown here feed into a greater political understanding and impetus to political action, or whether they are consumed as just one more commercial product.

BHM--a. oui      b. non      c. love

KV---My film OUR DAILY BREAD was called communist propaganda in the USA and capitalist propaganda in the USSR. From my viewpoint the film was not made for propaganda purposes. It is a subject in which I was interested and I thought it would make a good film. That is my sole reason for doing it.

4. One history (Quinze ans de cinema mondial by Guy Hennebelle) divides recent films into three categories: the Hollywood cinema; the cinema of authors or expression--the new wave, cinema novo; and the cinema that incites. Within the context of these distinctions what systems would you propose for grouping and discussing revolutionary films?



RC---As categories these three are a bit unclear to me insofar as they are allogeneous so that they are neither exclusive of each other nor as a triad do they appear inclusive of all types of recent films. In terms of revolutionary aspirations a film might fit into all three categories such as Battle of Algiers as Hollywood, auteurist and out to incite. But can one really make a film on revolution Hollywood-style? That goes back to questions Nos. 1 and 2. I believe that there is a contradiction between revolutionary subject and conventional bourgeois forms of representation. But in an inverted fashion the value of such work may be in the fact that it can and should be critiqued for what it is in its facile, media oriented "hip and now" idea of revolution and radical change. Regarding the second category, yes one can talk about the auteurist work of, for instance, Godard, the Dziga-Vertov Group, Godard's growing politicality, but one will presumably want to focus on the film and its political and/or revolutionary issues and will not dwell on Godard as individual artist but Godard and/or the Dziga Vertov Group as art workers and makers of art. By "cinema of expression" Hennebelle presumably means formal and stylistic issues and cinema as language. Here one might distinguish between those revolutionary films made which do become involved with both subject and form as form-of-expression, as language, etc, and the third category "cinema that incites" as agit-prop works whose prime concern is subject or content, although in theory formal concern and agit-prop art are not exclusive of each other.

CK---Systems are useful for arranging books on shelves or films in catalogues, but they mean little when we think about films in a political way. Films don't stand in isolation if they are revolutionary, they stand in relation to people's struggles. In some circumstances a Hollywood film might be progressive and useful; in different circumstances a very militant film might be what's needed. It would be stupid and obscene to be showing a movie when people were building barricades in the street outside the theatre.

JL---Of interest to me is how cinema can be used to "incite." Rather than just discussing the films, I would propose discussing the ways films can and should be used. IN THE YEAR OF THE PIG served as a revolutionary film in the context of the anti-war movement. It gave people protesting against the Vietnam war an argument and information that they wanted and would remember.

KV---I believe the grouping as set forth in the question is acceptable and covers any alternatives I may have in mind.

## 5. What films do you see as fitting your requirements?

RC---MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA--Dziga Vertov, 1929  
 LETTER TO JANE--Godard and Gorin, 1972  
 ARSENAL--Dovzenko, 1929  
 STRIKE--Eisenstein, 1924  
 OCTOBER--Eisenstein, 1928  
 WIND FROM THE EAST--Godard and Gorin, 1969



GC---I'm personally partial to narrative films that can successfully dramatize and communicate revolutionary themes to broad, general audiences, but I think many different kinds of films, in all sorts of possible formats, can be effectively utilized for radical or revolutionary political purposes. Films as different as BURN! and FINALLY GOT THE NEWS, for example, can both be considered as politically significant films, although in quite different ways.

HAY---Requirements for what? To make the revolution? You can't make the revolution on film, or so says Lina Wermuller and others with an eye on reality. There are no revolutionary films, only revolutionary situations, in which a particular film plays a particular role at a particular time. Any film which is used in a way which raises consciousness, points direction, softens defenses, shatters stereotypes is therefore up for nomination. Whether a film is revolutionary is determined not by an abstract concept but by the dialectics of a specific situation. Practically all the films being shown in the festival are inspiring, informative, thought-provoking works for film-makers and activists. For mass audiences in the USA, however, who have limited access to such films, due to the prevailing system of commercial distribution, we must look to the films which do have a progressive political effect insofar as they promote a strong, positive image of the strength of those who do not yet rule. We would include such films as WHITE LINE FEVER, MR. MAJESTYK, SWEET SWEETBACK, THE HARDER THEY COME, BILLY JACK, BORN LOSERS and similar films.

CK---At present in the US, we should be making and showing a very wide variety of films with progressive content and a vast range of forms. The most immediately useful films relate to the major ongoing struggles and movements today; anti-imperialism around the world, the feminist movement in the US, and the frequently ignored but substantial struggles of the American working class.

JL---If we want films to "incite," we must make them readily available. In Chicago, various groups have borrowed CAMPAMENTO, JANIE'S JANIE, THE WOMAN'S FILM, and SALT OF THE EARTH free or at little charge from the Public Library and from other radical groups. Accessibility makes the difference, for a "revolutionary" film has to reach the audience that's going to make the revolution.

BHM--A COMEDY IN SIX UNNATURAL ACTS--Jan Oxenberg  
HEALTHCARING--Women Make Movies  
INDIA SONG--Marguerite Duras  
THE FAR SHORE--Joyce Wieland

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